

# JEW'S DON'T DRINK – IT'S OFFICIAL

Jewish social history in British Parliamentary Papers

By Jonathan Fishburn

British Parliamentary Papers of the early 1900s are replete with references to the experience of Jewish refugees and their presumed characteristics. It was a time of rampant anti-semitism in Eastern Europe and mass migration of Jews to America, England and a few other countries that welcomed them. These official British documents are a rich source for this period of Anglo-Jewish history: the poverty of East End Jews, the immigration of Russian Jews, the impact of Sunday Trading Laws on Orthodox bakers and butchers, and even a psycho-social analysis of why Jews enter the clothes trade.

No doubt serious historians have made good use of these papers, but for the interested layperson this article is a brief foray into the densely filled pages of the British Parliamentary Papers to explore what they reveal about the multifarious layers of Anglo-Jewish life.

May I suggest that the first official British mention of 'Schnorrers', the affectionate term for Jewish beggars, was on 7 July 1902, when Dr Theodor Herzl gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration? As part of a wider discussion on the nature of Jewish nationalism and the ability of charitable organizations to help Jewish immigrants settle into their new community, Major Evans-Gordon asked Herzl, 'You consider that the efforts of the Jewish Board of Guardians and the Russian Jewish community here have broken down?'

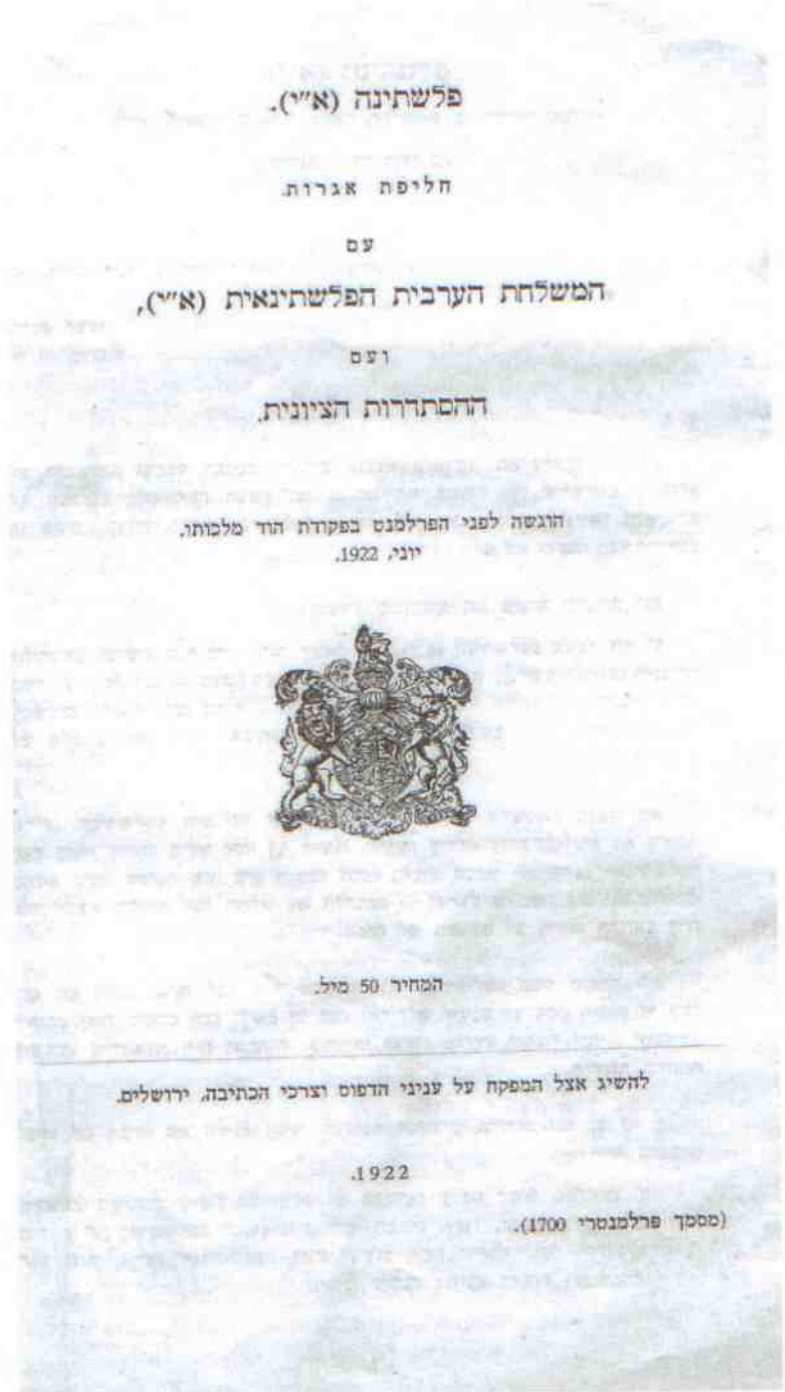
Herzl replied, 'In this sense – I think that they are not able to supply the need.' The dialogue continued:

EG: They cannot deal with the number of people who come here?

H: They cannot.

EG: Baron Hirsch left large benefactions for the Jewish people.

Command 1700: 'Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organisation'



H: Yes.  
 EG: Have those benefactions increased or diminished the evil?  
 H: I think they were rather ineffective one way or the other.  
 EG: They did not have any effect one way or the other?  
 H: No effect.  
 EG: With regard to the enormous question, they were nothing?  
 H: No.  
 EG: A drop in the ocean?  
 H: I really think they did not do more than provide for schools, and for several small agricultural stations.  
 EG: Did it do any good, or was it in your opinion, money wasted?  
 H: It was rather money wasted.  
 EG: The money spent on sending them to Argentina, partly?  
 H: Yes.  
 EG: And partly to Palestine?  
 H: No.  
 EG: Was none spent on the Zionist movement?  
 H: No.  
 EG: But they went to Argentina. Has that attempt to settle them in a country set apart for them been a failure? [A reference to Baron Hirsch's Jewish Colonisation Association, founded in 1891 with a view to resettling Russian Jews in Argentina]  
 H: It has been a failure because when you want a great settlement, you must have a flag and an idea. You cannot make those things only with money. A thing must have an idea in it; and as they had not that they could not succeed.  
 EG: It has been suggested to me that Baron Hirsch's charity tended to increase the number of what you call 'Schnorrers'?  
 H: I think so.  
 EG: It did?  
 H: I think so, because so many people know there is a large bag of money, and they come.  
 EG: And have a go at it?  
 H: I think so. All that is so natural – I do not think it is merely Jewish.

## What are British Parliamentary Papers?

British Parliamentary Papers consists of four segments:

1. Hansard's Debates (Commons and Lords) present the daily record of what is said in both Houses of Parliament.
2. The Journal of the House of Commons is an enlarged account of the proceedings of the House of Commons, compiled from the minutes and papers in the possession of the Clerks of the House.
3. The House of Lords Sessional Papers present

the Bills, Reports of Committees, Reports of Commissions, and Accounts and Papers which, when combined with the House of Commons Sessional Papers, provide the history of Parliamentary actions.

4. The House of Commons Sessional Papers consist of Bills, Reports, Accounts and Papers, and Command Papers. Command Papers do not originate in Parliament but are 'presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her (or His) Majesty'. Many of the issues discussed in this article are found in Command Papers, as Royal Commission Reports and treaties are the most common Command Papers.

## Zionism

At the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration (Command 1741), Herzl's lengthy statement included the following observations:

The fact there is now for the first time since Cromwell a perceptible number of our people in England is the true cause of this Commission being called together . . . you have had witnesses before you who have explained to you the reasons which induce Jews from Eastern Europe to come to this country and to America. Permit me to say that it is not by any means chiefly material advantages that draw them hither – moral advantages play the larger part – a desire for the freedom of life and soul which the Jew in Europe cannot under present conditions know in Eastern Europe . . .

Then there is the proposal of assimilation and, of course, those who put forward assimilation as a solution of the Jewish question do not mean merely an apish assimilation or slavish and often vulgar imitation. They mean, I suppose, assimilation by intermarriage, so that the small stream of our race may be merged and lost in the broad stream of peoples amongst whom they live . . .

The Jews of Eastern Europe cannot stay where they are – where are they to go? If you find that they are not wanted here – then some place must be found to which they can migrate without by that migration raising the problems that confront them here. These problems will not arise if a home be found them which will be legally recognised as Jewish.

As we know, the Zionist movement gained strength in the early 1900s and, given the British control of Palestine until 1948, Command Papers that deal with Zionism are fascinating. In fact, Command 1700, 'Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organisation' (presented to Parliament in June 1922), was published in two versions: English and Hebrew.

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This is the third in a series of articles dealing with unusual aspects of the history of printed material relating to Jews.



Anno vicesimo septimo

# Georgii II. Regis.

An Act to repeal an Act of the Twenty sixth Year of His Majesty's Reign, intituled, *An Act to permit Persons professing the Jewish Religion to be naturalized by Parliament; and for other Purposes therein mentioned.*



WHEREAS an Act of Par-<sup>Preamble.</sup>  
liament was made and passed  
in the Twenty sixth Year of  
His Majesty's Reign, intituled,  
An Act to permit Persons  
professing the *Jewish* Religion  
to be naturalized by Parlia-  
ment; and for other Purposes  
therein mentioned: And where-  
as Occasion has been taken  
from the said Act, to raise Dis-  
contents, and to disquiet the  
Minds of many of His Majesty's Subjects; be it en-  
acted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and  
with



## Antisemitism

The 1919 government paper 'Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia, presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty' (Command 8) contains not only graphic details of the atrocities committed, but also clear references to the Jews who were considered to be behind them. The report smacks of a theory of Jewish conspiracy – and it has long been understood that, due to the government's embarrassment, the original edition was withdrawn almost immediately after publication. It was replaced by a shorter version from which essential details had been deleted. Only a very few copies of the original are believed to exist, from which the following short excerpts are taken:

In a letter by Sir M. Findlay to Mr Balfour:

if an end is not put to Bolshevism in Russia at once, the civilisation of the whole world will be threatened. . . . I consider the suppression of Bolshevism is the greatest issue now before the world, not even excluding the war which is still raging, and unless, as above stated, Bolshevism is nipped in the bud immediately, it is bound to spread in one form or another over Europe and the whole world, as it is organised and worked by Jews who have no nationality, and whose one object is to destroy for their own ends the existing order of things.

In a memorandum on conditions in Moscow by a British subject, who left Moscow on 1 December:

The economic and social conditions in Moscow are in a state of chaos. All trade and commerce – except illicit trading which is still carried on by the Jews – is at a complete standstill.

On 5 February 1919, General Knox sent a message to the War Office:

With regard to the murder of Imperial family at Ekaterinburg, there is further evidence to show that there are two parties in the local Soviet, one which was anxious to save Imperial family, and the latter, headed by five Jews, two of whom were determined to have them murdered. These two Jews, by name Vainen and Safarof, went with Lenin when he made a journey across Germany.

In a letter from Reverend B. S. Lombard to Earl Curzon on 23 March 1919, it was written:

My Lord,  
I BEG [sic] to forward to your Lordship the following details with reference to Bolshevism in Russia . . . It originated in German propaganda, and was, and is being carried out by international Jews . . . All business became

paralysed, shops were closed, Jews became possessors of most of the business houses, and horrible scenes of starvation became common in the country districts.

And finally, in a memorandum by Mr B. on the 'Progress of Bolshevism Abroad', it is noted that

At the Putilof Works, anti-Semitism is growing, probably because the food supply committees are entirely in the hands of Jews – and voices can be heard sometimes calling for a 'pogrom'.

## Sunday Trading Laws

I live in Golders Green, with a large number of Jewish shops that are closed on Saturday and open on Sunday. In our 24/7 society, it's easy to forget that the imposition of restricted trading on Sundays presented difficulties for Orthodox Jewish shopkeepers. Almost 100 years ago, on 14 May 1906, Reverend Herman Adler, the then Chief Rabbi, was called as witness to the Joint Select Committee on Sunday Trading. He claimed that:

A law compelling Jewish traders to close their shops on Sunday would press with undue and exceptional severity on Jewish butchers and poulterers. Even if their own conscientious scruples would not urge them to abstain from business on Saturdays, the regulations under which they hold their licences from the Jewish Ecclesiastical Authorities and the Board of Shechita would oblige them to keep their shops closed . . . Jewish bakers, who employ Jewish workmen, and who have not worked on Saturdays, should be allowed to bake bread and supply their customers on Sundays . . . The enforcing of a Sunday Closing Act would mean starvation to themselves and their families.

An insight into a Jewish baker's life was presented by Mr Joseph Watkin, who was questioned by Mr Stuart Samuel on 17 May 1906:

SS: You are a Jew and a naturalised British Subject?

JW: Yes.

SS: You have been in this country 25 years?

JW: Yes.

SS: I understand that you are a baker in Liverpool

JW: Yes.

SS: How long have you been a baker in Liverpool?

JW: About 25 years.

SS: Do you bake on Sunday?

JW: Yes.

SS: Do you bake on Saturday?

JW: No.

SS: Are you closed on Saturday?

JW: Yes.

SS: Up till what time –

JW: Some time after sunset.



SS: Do you close on Friday at sunset?  
 JW: Yes.  
 SS: There has been some evidence given here by Mr Hicks, who is chairman of the Baker's Union, I believe in Liverpool. Are you a member of that Union?  
 JW: I used to be.  
 SS: You are no longer?  
 JW: No.  
 SS: It has been stated that the Jews bake on Sunday and supply Christian shops known as huckster's shops. Within your knowledge have you known that to occur?  
 JW: Never, we do not bake that sort of bread.  
 SS: What sort of bread do you bake?  
 JW: Black and brown, and a fancy white bread which would be too expensive for the poor class of the Christian people to eat. They do not want to pay the price.  
 SS: Who do you bake for?  
 JW: Mostly the Jews.  
 SS: Have you in Liverpool a wealthy Jewish class?  
 JW: Even the poorer class like to have good bread.  
 SS: They are prepared to pay the price?  
 JW: Yes.  
 SS: You bake practically what is a foreign bread?  
 JW: Yes.  
 SS: And it appeals to foreigners rather than to English people?  
 JW: Yes.

Later Mr Gulland asked:

G: As a matter of fact, the black bread – the rye bread – that you make, keeps longer than the white bread?  
 JW: Yes.  
 G: How long would it be good for?  
 JW: A few days.  
 G: And if you did not bake on Sunday, your Friday's baking would be quite good on Monday?  
 JW: Yes, but not the white bread, only the brown bread . . .  
 G: We have evidence from Liverpool that the Jewish bakers drive out this bread to hucksters. You may not do it, but apparently other Jewish bakers do.  
 JW: That is exactly what I have come here for, after reading Mr Hicks' evidence. I do not know where he gets his evidence. I was most surprised to see it.  
 G: You do not know any Jewish bakers that do that?  
 JW: No there are only eight Jewish bakers in Liverpool.  
 G: You think none of you supply Christians on Sunday?  
 JW: No.  
 G: Evidently, Mr Hicks thinks so, and evidently there is a feeling amongst the Christian bakers in Liverpool that because of your competition on Sunday, they would be forced to open on Sunday. You are creating a hardship upon them.  
 JW: But it is not the truth.

FOREIGN OFFICE.

1894.

MISCELLANEOUS SERIES.

N<sup>o</sup>. 323.

REPORTS ON SUBJECTS OF GENERAL AND  
 COMMERCIAL INTEREST.

ARGENTINE REPUBLIC.

REPORT ON

BARON HIRSCH'S JEWISH COLONISATION  
 SCHEME.

*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty,  
 MARCH, 1894.*

LONDON,  
 PRINTED FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE,  
 BY HARRISON AND SONS, ST. MARTIN'S LANE,  
 PRINTERS IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY.

Even before Herzl was questioned about it, Baron Hirsch's Jewish Colonisation Scheme in Argentina had attracted British official interest

### Poverty

Sadly, there were other reminders of the hardships faced by Jewish families unable to give their children bread. Based on the evidence of Mrs Adler (was this the wife of the Chief Rabbi?) in a report on the Medical Inspection and Feeding of Children in 1906, it was stated that

The Jews have in London special organizations for providing meals for Jewish children. The largest of these is the 'Jewish Children's Penny Dinner Association', which organises the supply of meals for Jewish children residing in the City, Whitechapel, Spitalfields and St Georges-in-the-East . . . It is a matter of common knowledge that the Jewish mothers take more care of their children, especially in the matter of food, than Gentile mothers. Still there are many cases where school meals are considered to be needed to supplement what can be done at home, and in the year ending 31st December, 1904, nearly 72,000 meals

were given by the Penny Dinner Association alone, without reckoning a large number of breakfasts.

In her own words, Mrs Adler's comments give the reader some idea of the day-to-day struggle of poor families:

Mrs Adler: The meal given comprises Irish stew with the meat cut up into small pieces with potatoes and vegetables, soup with meat cut up into small dice thickened with potatoes, beans, peas, vegetables rice and lentils . . . The quantity of meat supplied is about two oz. for each child, and bread is given as required. 71,718 meals were given in 1904 . . . When the poverty is great, we do not insist on the penny.

Chairman: You give the meal four days a week?

Adler: Yes.

Chairman: The day you omit being Friday?

Adler: Yes.

Chairman: Because the children go home early?

Adler: Yes – the interval is too short . . . Most of our people if they starve through the week will always get something to cook for the Sabbath. That is an absolute fact, you will find them subsisting on very scant fare during the week, but they always manage to get something for the Sabbath.

## Immigration and labour trends

The inner workings of the clothes trade are documented in 'The Reports on the Volume and Effects of Recent Immigration from Eastern Europe into the United Kingdom', published in 1894 (C 7406). They are also revealing of attitudes to gender-based divisions of labour:

It is one of the special features of the Jewish system of subdivision to give no part of a garment to a woman to do which a man or boy could do better, and no part to a man which a woman could do better, always provided enough workers of either sex can be obtained. Male labour happens to be abundant: skilled female labour is comparatively scarce. Men making button holes are slower than women, and would earn less if paid at the same rate, therefore women in Jewish shops make the buttonholes . . . But whenever women can do the same work as youths or men, they seem to be paid for the work . . . In London, in Leeds, and in Manchester, the impression left on me was that the Jewish employers in choosing their workpeople give the preference to capacity rather than to cheapness; that they engage the man or woman who can do the most work in the time, not the one who asks the lowest pay for it.

In a psycho-social discussion of why Jews prefer to work at home or in a small workshop, it was suggested that this work reinforces:

one of their most characteristic tendencies viz., the preference for a livelihood from petty profit to that derived from weekly wages . . . No trade offers such chances in this respect as the cheap clothing industry, especially that form of it known as 'out-work' in which, the material being supplied by the warehouse or large manufactory, the capital required by the small master is reduced to its lowest point. The foreign immigrants therefore tend naturally to gravitate towards the cheap clothing trades and they are for several reasons especially fitted to pursue them with success. Thus, for example, the clothing trades are very intermittent and irregular in character, and the London trade is exposed to the very keen and probably growing competition of the large provincial factories. Under these circumstances, the Jew is fitted to survive, as compared with the Englishman, by the extreme 'elasticity' or indefiniteness of this standard of comfort.

This quality is the economic aspect of that persistence and pliancy under difficulties of environment which have always characterised the Jews.\*

The most noticeable point about the earnings of the Jewish workman is not their meagreness or their magnitude, but their extraordinary range . . . Moreover the immigrant Jew shows more resource than the English workman in the organization of enforced leisure due to seasonal changes of trade . . . The slipper maker in spring takes to lasting or finishing, the tailor in autumn becomes a hawk. Or if such material resources fail him, he will often occupy the spare time left him by the slackness of his trade in the study or discussion of the Talmud or other Jewish literature.

There is an asterisk in the report, and at the bottom of the page in a small font the following footnote:

It must be understood that no opinion is expressed on the controversy as to how far such characteristics are really racial and how far they are the product of social circumstances. (See Jacob's 'Racial Characteristics of the Jews', *Anthropological Journal*, Vol. XV p.23)

From the same report, we finally have *official* proof that Jews are not big drinkers:

Gambling appears to be a very well marked cause of Jewish destitution, but the two most prominent and incurable defects which lead to English pauperism, viz. drink and laziness, appear almost absent in the case of the Jews.

Space permits only a small selection of insights into Anglo-Jewish life. However, if this has whetted your curiosity, British Parliamentary Papers are available in major libraries and more recent papers can also be accessed via the internet on [www.polis.parliament.uk](http://www.polis.parliament.uk), the Parliamentary Online Indexing Service. ♦